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## International Labor Conferences

BY GEORGE PERRY MORRIS

During the past month Washington has been the seat of sessions of two important gatherings of persons interested in bettering and standardizing conditions of labor throughout the world. One, the International Working Women's Congress, closed its sessions on November 6, having passed resolutions dealing with child labor, a universal maximum eight-hour day, prohibition of night work, forbidding employment of women in hazardous occupations, demanding establishment by all nations of free employment bureaus, and condemning labor by women for six weeks before and six weeks after child-birth. These resolutions were formally passed on to the International Labor Congress, also sitting in the city, in order that that body might take into account the opinion of women about women as workers in formulating its conclusions.

The host of this gathering of women was a group of American women trade-unionists, who agreed to assume responsibility for the assembly after being urged to call it by French and British working women, when it became clear that the International Labor Congress was not to admit women as delegates but only in advisory and clerical capacities.

The Americas, Europe, and Asia were represented by delegates. Neither Germany nor Russia had representatives present; but the Congress took action showing that it was quite willing to admit persons from those countries at any time. The initiative in this fraternal attitude was taken by the French and British delegates. A place has been left open in the permanent organization for a representative from the Central Powers, who will serve as one of the vice-presidents. The president for the coming year is Mrs. Raymond Robbins, president of the American Women's Trade Union League.

The International Labor Conference opened on October 29, and plans to close on November 29. It has met in the regal quarters of the Pan-American Union Building, and at its first session had present representatives of 32 nations, made up of men from three groups—governmental, employers, and workers. No representatives of Germany or Austria were present because not invited, and no representatives from the United States were present as voting members because of delayed action in making the United States signatory to the treaty. Later, the conference, with only one member dissenting (a representative of the French employers), voted to admit German and Austrian delegates, should they appear; and Finland also was given the same right of non-voting representation that the United States had.

The welcome to the conference in behalf of the United States was given by Secretary Wilson, of the Department of Labor, a natural choice; and later he was elected chairman. His speech of welcome was candid, in that he recognized his anomalous position and also that of the nation which was acting as host by specific directions of a treaty to which the nation was not yet a signatory. The situation, as he described it, was thus defined: "The treaty specified that it (the conference) must be convened in October, and the first function intrusted to us is an accomplished fact. The second function, that of organizing the conference, is a continuing process until the organization has been completed. The completion of the organization cannot take place until the League of Nations has been created." His speech showed that he had no suspicion that the League might not come

into being, or that, if it did, the United States might not be in it. Placed in a difficult personal and official position, he proceeded to organize the conference.

Hardly had it begun when Spain and the Latin American countries, with more than a third of the delegates present, asserted successfully their right to have Spanish, as well as French and English, made one of the languages in which the conference's proceedings should be printed and if possible translated from day to day. On the first point they won, though the cost of publication will not be borne by the conference.

Ere long both the workers' delegates and the employers' also, but especially the former, protested against the choice of delegates from governments of so many lesser as well as major diplomatic representatives of those governments in Washington. It was argued that in few cases had they any competency for the task they were called upon to perform.

Later, the workers' delegates made it their business to let the conference understand, and Japan in particular know, that they did not care to have listed as representatives of labor any person not favored by "labor" in the country from which he came. The cause for this protest was the alleged selection by the Japanese Government of a labor representative repugnant to Japan's organized labor. Formal action in the way of expulsion was not asked for nor favored by the conference, but the protest is significant and prophetic. If labor is to negotiate as a group in a world conference, she wants her representatives to be beyond suspicion as to class loyalty.

In the course of time, attacks by Senators, in open debate, upon the conference as such—attacks impugning the legality of its organization and the loyalty of many of its members to government as such—attracted the attention of European Socialist delegates to the conference and led to indignant protests (informal and non-official). These attacks, together with the declination of Congress to make suitable financial provision for entertainment of the conference by the nation, have not improved the estimate of the United States which important leaders of large sections of the populations of Europe and Asia are to hold, as the internationalizing of the world goes on. Moreover, the Senate's formal action on the 18th, when it passed a reservation withholding the nation's assent to Part XIII, Articles 387 to 427, unless Congress by act or formal resolution makes provision for representation in the organization nominally set up by the treaty, made it quite clear that the "nationalistic" attitude in settling labor questions still is strong and will challenge present committal of the United States to any other policy.

The conference, within a reasonable period after organizing—a process for which there were few precedents and an affair not easy under circumstances above hinted at—set about forming the committees which later would report upon the limited number of definite subjects assigned in the treaty for consideration; and most of the month was spent in the deliberations of these committees and in the final debate prior to formulating the conference's conclusions. Difficulties, due to differing racial, national, class, and vocational points of view, at once confronted these men, assembled to standardize, if possible, a process that statesmen in all countries see cannot be allowed to go unguided and unrestrained if States and standards of civilization are to evolve normally and with maximum advantage to all peoples. Criticism of the achievements of this conference must take into account these difficulties.